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Cat Quine

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Reading "House of Jacob" in Isaiah 48:1–11 in Light of Benjamin

CAT QUINE
catherine.quine@nottingham.ac.uk
University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD, United Kingdom

Isaiah 48:1–11 has been described as a difficult passage because of a perceived discord between its harsh tone and the message of comfort espoused elsewhere in Isa 40–55. This article analyzes this passage with regard to four groups of arguments: proposals of a Judahite origin for the text, the archaeological evidence for settlement continuity in the Benjaminite region in the Neo-Babylonian period, the development and use of the patriarchal traditions in the sixth century, and studies of hidden polemic. Drawing these together, I propose that the address to the house of Jacob in Isa 48:1–2 can be understood as referring to a sixth-century Judahite community in the Benjaminite region, perhaps in the vicinity of Bethel.

Isaiah 48:1–11 comprises a series of harsh statements against the house of Jacob that have caused some difficulty for interpreters. Some scholars see no issue with the content of these verses and note pejorative statements directed at Jacob-Israel elsewhere in chapters 40–48. Others, however, attempt to harmonize the section with other material in chapters 40–55 by attributing particular phrases to later redactors. These efforts suggest that some uncertainty about the provenance of these verses persists.[1] The origin of Isa 40–55 as a whole has been widely debated, but in recent years strong arguments have been made in favor of a Judahite origin

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[1] See the table of redactional proposals in A. Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour: A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Is. XL–LV*, VTSup 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 285, table 6; and more recent comments in Chris Franke, *Isaiah 46, 47, and 48: A New Literary-Critical Reading*, Biblical and Judaic Studies 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 173–244, here 271. John Goldingay and David Payne note that verses 1, 12, and 20 all start new sections within the chapter, each building on previous verses (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, 2 vols., ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 2:116. Due to considerations of space, I will deal only with 48:1–11, though a broader range of verses will be taken into account in a future research project.

for the core material of the text.[2] I accept these proposals and combine them with textual and archaeological evidence from Judah in the sixth century, in order to approach Isa 48:1–11 in light of issues that may have arisen in a Judahite context at this time.[3]

In section I, I look briefly at the arguments regarding a Judahite origin for Isa 40–55.[4] In section II, I consider the archaeological evidence for settlement continuity and growth in the Benjaminite region in the sixth century, before commenting specifically on the situation of Bethel.[5] In section III, I examine Jacob's association with Bethel in light of recent studies regarding the development and use of the Jacob and Abraham traditions in the exilic period. Finally, in section IV, I return to Isa 48:1–11 and analyze it on the basis of the preceding sections, proposing to read the "house of Jacob" in light of a sixth-century community in the Benjaminite region of Judah, most likely in the vicinity of Bethel. In this interpretation, Isa 48:1–11 may be shown to be in keeping with the prophet's rhetoric elsewhere in chapters 40–55 and in accord with theological and rhetorical developments in other exilic texts. By focusing on Bethel and raising the probability of other

[2] See Moses Buttenwieser, "Where Did Deutero-Isaiah Live?," *JBL* 38 (1919): 94–112, https://doi.org/10.2307/3259155. See also, e.g., Hans M. Barstad, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Book of Isaiah: "Exilic" Judah and the Provenance of Isaiah 40–55* (Oslo: Novus, Instituttet fur sammenlignende kulturforskning, 1997); Barstad, *A Way in the Wilderness: The "Second Exodus" in the Message of Second Isaiah*, JSSMS 12 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40–55*, VTSup 139 (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Tiemeyer, "Geography and Textual Allusions: Interpreting Isaiah XL–LV and Lamentations as Judahite Texts," *VT* 57 (2007): 367–85; M. Goulder, "Deutero-Isaiah of Jerusalem," *JSOT* 28 (2004): 351–62.

[3] All dates given in this article are BCE.

[4] In this article, "Isa 40–55" refers to the core material in these chapters; it is not a claim for the unity of chapters 40–55 as a whole. For observations of redactional levels and editorial developments within Isa 40–55, see, e.g., Jürgen van Oorschot, *Von Babel zum Zion: Eine literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, BZAW 206 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century BCE*, trans. David Green, SBLStBL 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

[5] In this article, "Benjamin" refers to the cities north of Jerusalem that survived the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586. The region of Benjamin seems to have had fairly fluid borders for most of its existence; consequently, the exact relationship between Benjamin and Judah after the fall of the northern kingdom, and thereafter in the seventh–fifth centuries, is as yet unclear. Notable works on the subject include Klaus-Dietrich Schunck, *Benjamin: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Geschichte eines israelitischen Stammes*, BZAW 86 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1963); Schunck, "Benjamin," *ABD* 1:671–73; Philip R. Davies, "The Trouble with Benjamin," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld*, ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker, VTSup 113 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 93–111; Davies, "The Origin of Biblical Israel," in *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na'aman*, ed. Yairah Amit et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 141–49; Benjamin D. Giffone, *"Sit at My Right Hand": The Chronicler's Portrait of Benjamin in the Social Context of Yehud*, LHBOTS 628 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

Yahwistic shrines and communities within Judah, I demonstrate the likelihood of intracommunal strife within the Yahwistic community in the sixth century. With regard to the book of Isaiah, this intracommunal strife does not begin with the returnees from Babylon in Isa 56–66 but, in all likelihood, was present at any time when the interpretation of the true Israel was up for discussion.

I. An Anonymous Prophet in Exilic Judah

The difficulty of identifying the location of Isa 40–55 has provoked interest from scholars since the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[6] Hans Barstad's *Babylonian Captivity* demonstrates well the weaknesses in arguments claiming, or assuming, a Babylonian origin for the text.[7] More recently, Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer's monograph *For the Comfort of Zion*, has furthered considerably the case for a Judahite origin of Isa 40–55.[8] She systematically works through the text, demonstrating both where the text appears to betray a Judahite provenance and, equally importantly, where the theology or content of the verses might be closer to a Judahite perspective than a Babylonian one despite the absence of explicit information.[9] In a separate study, Tiemeyer laid out six reasons in favor of a Judahite author, including observations regarding the flora and fauna referred to in Isa 40–55, the pervading focus on Jerusalem and corresponding lack of focus on Babylon (except Isa 47), and the seeming geographical orientation behind statements such as "go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea" (Isa 48:20).[10] On the basis of the trees listed in Isa 44, Simon J. Sherwin has also argued for a western origin of the text, and the comments of Robert Koops and Michael Zohary on the trees mentioned elsewhere in Isa 40–55 (41:18; 44:4, 14; 55:13) are also instructive on this point.[11] A Judahite

[6] E.g., Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*, HAT 3.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902), 336; Heinrich Ewald, *Die jüngsten Propheten des Alten Bundes mit den Büchern Barukh und Daniel*, vol. 3 of *Die Propheten des alten Bundes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1868), 30–31; Rudolf Kittel, "Cyrus und Deuterojesaja," *ZAW* 18 (1898): 149–62; Buttenwieser, "Where Did Deutero-Isaiah Live?"; William H. Cobb, "Where Was Isaiah XL–LXV Written?," *JBL* 27 (1908): 48–64, https://doi.org/10.2307/3260071; John A. Maynard, "The Home of Deutero-Isaiah," *JBL* 36 (1917): 213–24, https://doi.org/10.2307/3259227; Menahem Haran, "The Literary Structure and Chronological Framework of the Prophecies in Is. xl–xlviii," in *Congress Volume: Bonn 1962*, VTSup 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 127–55, esp. 150–55; R. Abma, "Travelling from Babylon to Zion: Location and Function in Isaiah 49–55," *JSOT* 74 (1997): 3–28. See also the works referred to in n. 2 above.

[7] Barstad, *Babylonian Captivity*, esp. 59–75.

[8] Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, esp. 131–329.

[9] Ibid., esp. 132–53.

[10] Tiemeyer, "Geography and Textual Allusions," 369.

[11] Simon J. Sherwin, "In Search of Trees: Isaiah XLV 14 and Its Implications," *VT* 53 (2003): 514–29; Robert Koops, *Each according to Its Kind: Plants and Trees in the Bible* (Reading: United

location has also been suggested by recent studies on the patriarchal traditions in the exilic period. C. A. Strine has highlighted Ezekiel's polemic against those who remained in the land of Judah and claimed it for themselves, which they expressed via recourse to the promise of the land to Abraham (Ezek 33:23; cf. 11:15).[12] Tiemeyer also notes the use of the Abraham traditions in a range of exilic and early postexilic texts, including Isa 40–55 (Ezek 33:23, Isa 41:8, 51:2, 62:16, Neh 9:7–8).[13] The polemic against Babylon and its gods in Isa 46:1–2 and chapter 47 should also be taken into consideration; most scholars date the core material of Isa 40–55 shortly prior to the fall of Babylon in 539, on account of the references to Cyrus and the manner in which the prophet predicts the conquering of Babylon. Although Cyrus was gaining momentum during this time, it is unclear that a prophet could so openly mock Babylon and, in particular, the Babylonian gods, while Babylon was still in control of the exiled groups. With regard to the exiles in Babylon, Strine observes a correlation between proximity and polemic; in his view, Ezekiel says covertly against Babylon what Isa 40–55 can say overtly. This contrast suggests that the authors differed in time period as well as location.[14] In this context it seems more reasonable to view the overt polemic against Babylon in Isa 40–55 as originating in Judah, rather than among the Babylonian exiles.

II. Sixth-Century Judah and Benjamin

Having briefly outlined the reasoning for approaching Isa 40–55 as a Judahite text, I next consider some aspects of the historical reality of sixth-century Judah and Benjamin that would have influenced its author and formed the background against which the text was written. To this end, I will give more attention to Benjamin than has been typical of previous studies of Isa 40–55. In recent years scholarship has increasingly begun to focus on the role of Benjamin in the formation of Israelite identity and traditions in the exilic period, which seems a sensible development given that the Benjaminite region became preeminent in Judah during this time. If we are to argue for a Judahite Isa 40–55, then the role of Benjamin should be taken into account. Jill Middlemas has proposed the phrase "templeless Judah" to refer to the land of Judah in the exilic period, in order to acknowledge

Bible Societies, 2012); Michael Zohary, *Plants of the Bible: A Handbook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1982).

[12] C. A. Strine further argues that Ezekiel polemicizes against a combined Abraham-Jacob tradition and contends that there is a polemic against Jacob in a case of "hidden identity" in Ezek 35–36 (*Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel and the Polemics of Exile*, BZAW 436 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013], 177–215, here 193–211).

[13] Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Abraham—A Judahite Prerogative," *ZAW* 120 (2008): 49–66.

[14] Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 257–58.

the existence of the nonexiles who remained in the land.[15] Yet, in view of my purpose here, that is, to raise the possibility that Isa 40–55 was aware of other Yahwistic cult sites functioning in the sixth century, it would be inappropriate to use the term "templeless Judah." Therefore I refer to the land of Judah during the Neo-Babylonian period using the terms "exilic," or "sixth century."[16] In the past twenty years or so, archaeological and historical scholarship has sought to rectify the previous unfortunate lacuna in studies regarding this period.[17] Through these recent works, it has become clear that, although the areas around Jerusalem and, more centrally, in the Shephelah, suffered destruction or decline immediately after 586, the regions north of Jerusalem, particularly around Mizpah and Gibeon, did not.[18] Regarding the region of Benjamin, Oded Lipschits observes that

> no evidence emerges of destruction at the beginning of the sixth century, apart from the razing of parts of Tell el-Ful. At all the excavated sites evidence of continuity of settlement exists between the seventh and sixth centuries, and of their existence throughout the time of Babylonian rule, until the last third of the sixth century.[19]

The material culture of the population that remained in Benjamin was continuous with that of the pre-586 settlements, such that archaeologists have been unable to identify any change between early sixth-century and mid-sixth-century pottery.[20]

[15] Jill Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah*, OTM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[16] Given the multiplicity of exiles and exilic communities, the breadth of the term *exilic* can be somewhat difficult when one wishes to speak specifically about a particular time, region, or group in the ancient Near East in the eighth–fifth centuries. Where possible in this article, therefore, I have endeavored to use the wordier but occasionally more accurate term *sixth century*. *Exilic* is used when a broader term is required.

[17] E.g., Oded Lipschits, "Demographic Changes in Judah between the 7th and 5th Centuries BCE," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 323–76; Lipschits, "The History of the Benjaminite Region under Babylonian Rule," *TA* 26 (1999): 155–90; Erhard Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period: The Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E.*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann, SBLBE 8 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011); Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Benjamin Traditions Read in the Early Persian Period," in Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 629–47.

[18] E.g., Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest*, JSOTSup 146 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 806–7; J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 426.

[19] Lipschits, "History of the Benjaminite Region," 179.

[20] Ibid., 179–80; cf. Oded Lipschits, "Shedding New Light on the Dark Years of the 'Exilic Period': New Studies, Further Elucidation and Some Questions regarding the Archaeology of Judah as an 'Empty Land,'" in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, AIL 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 57–90, esp. 66–68.

Administrative continuity has also been noted at Ramat Raḥel, Mizpah (Tell en-Naṣbeh) and Gibeon (el-Jib). These observations of continuity are unsurprising, given that Jeremiah 40–41 narrates the transition of government from Jerusalem to Mizpah under Gedaliah, and other narratives indicate that people were already leaving Jerusalem for the Benjaminite region prior to the fall of the city (e.g., Jer 37:11–15).[21]

In this light, the lack of any mention of the Benjaminite cities in Isa 40–55 and Ezekiel is striking. Ezekiel portrays Judah as a desolate and ruined land as part of his polemic against those who remained there.[22] Interestingly, Isa 40–55 does the same, though it is not generally considered polemical. In chapters 40–55, the only two cities specifically mentioned are Jerusalem and Babylon, while all other cities, and the land of Judah, are portrayed as ruined and desolate (cf. 42:22; 43:28; 44:26; 47:6; 49:8, 19; 51:3; 54:3). The prophet's focus on the restoration of Jerusalem is usually assumed to explain the emphasis on Judah's ruin. If chapters 40–55 are considered to be a Judahite text, however, then the omission of Mizpah, Gibeon, Bethel, or any functioning Benjaminite city is noteworthy.

I turn next to a discussion of Bethel, which both illuminates these preceding comments on Judah and Benjamin in the Neo-Babylonian period and also moves the discussion forward into the realms of tradition and polemic.

Bethel

Since 1838, Bethel has been identified with Beitin and, notwithstanding David Livingston and John Bimson's alternative proposal of el-Bireh, the majority of scholars hold to this view.[23] Beitin was excavated by James L. Kelso in 1954, 1957, and 1960 after an initial sounding by W. F. Albright in 1927 and the first campaign by Albright and Kelso in 1934.[24] The excavations provided evidence of a long

[21] Middlemas, *Templeless Judah*, 41–46; Jeffrey R. Zorn, "The Levant during the Babylonian Period," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant c. 8000–332 BCE*, ed. Margreet L. Steiner and Ann E. Killebrew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 825–41, here 829; Zorn, "Naṣbeh, Tel en-," *NEAEHL* 3:1098–1102; Davies, "Origin of Biblical Israel," 141–49; Hans M. Barstad, "After the 'Myth of the Empty Land': Major Challenges in the Study of Neo-Babylonian Judah," in Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 3–21, here 6–11; Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 82–90; Jason Radine, *The Book of Amos in Emergent Judah*, FAT 2/45 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 185.

[22] Ezek 12:15–20, 15:7–8, 33:23–29.

[23] John J. Bimson and David Livingston, "Redating the Exodus," *BAR* 13 (1987): 40–53, 66–68; David Livingston, "Location of Biblical Bethel and Ai Reconsidered," *WTJ* 33 (1970): 20–44; Livingston, "Further Considerations on the Location of Bethel at el-Bireh," *PEQ* 126 (1994): 154–59; cf. Jules Francis Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel and the Configuration of Israelite Identity*, BZAW 368 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 2–7.

[24] See W. F. Albright, "The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel," *BASOR* 56 (1934): 1–15; James L. Kelso, "The Second Campaign at Bethel," *BASOR* 137 (1955): 5–10; Kelso, "Excavations

history of occupation and use of the site, from the Chalcolithic through to the Byzantine period but found no evidence of an Iron Age temple. In 2009, Israel Finkelstein and Lily Singer-Avitz reanalyzed the reports and finds from these excavations.[25] They noted the difficulty of assigning the pottery vessels to an original context and, in any case, found that most of the loci were mixed.[26] Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz did, however, note that much of the pottery the excavators had identified as sixth century BCE had come from loci marked on the excavation plans as Iron I. This, combined with the small evidence for Persian-period activity, led them to conclude that Bethel was most likely very small in the Neo-Babylonian–Persian periods.[27] Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz note that the lack of destruction layers in the first half of the seventh century makes dating difficult but points to the lack of "unambiguous evidence" for Neo-Babylonian or Persian-period settlement to suggest that Bethel was in a state of decline at this time.[28] It is important to note, however, that much of Beitin is covered by modern buildings. The fact that the excavators found no evidence of the temple suggests that the main settlement was either beneath or outside modern Beitin and remains unexcavated.[29] In this case, absence of evidence cannot entirely prove absence of historical settlement. Though appreciated, the efforts of Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz to reevaluate the Bethel material do little to challenge the prevailing view that, while the archaeology of Bethel is inconclusive, textual considerations suggest that habitation at Bethel continued in the exilic period.[30]

Contrary to Finkelstein's view that Bethel was in decline from the seventh century, Lipschits's survey of demographic changes in Judah and Benjamin suggests that the decline of the Benjaminite region, including Bethel, began toward the end of the sixth century rather than at the beginning.[31] Although the finds from Bethel are scant for the sixth–fifth centuries, the fact remains that Bethel is in close proximity to Mizpah and Gibeon, the former of which became the new administrative center of the region and experienced some measure of prosperity; for the latter there is evidence of settlement continuity and growth and continued production

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at Bethel," *BASOR* 19 (1956): 36–43; Kelso, "The Third Campaign at Bethel," *BASOR* 151 (1958): 3–8; Kelso, "The Fourth Campaign at Bethel," *BASOR* 164 (1961): 5–19; Kelso, *The Excavation of Bethel 1934–1960*, AASOR 39 (Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1968).

[25] Israel Finkelstein and Lily Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," *ZDPV* 125 (2009): 33–48.

[26] Ibid., 36.

[27] Ibid., 40–43.

[28] Ibid., 43–45.

[29] See Nadav Na'aman, "Beth-Aven, Bethel and Early Israelite Sanctuaries," *ZPDV* 103 (1987): 13–21.

[30] So, e.g., Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period," in Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 93–107, here 93–94; Blenkinsopp, "Benjamin Traditions," 643; Lipschits, "Shedding New Light," 66–67, 83; Gomes, *Sanctuary at Bethel*, 59–111.

[31] Lipschits, "Demographic Changes," 347–51.

of wine.[32] Blenkinsopp has argued strongly for the likelihood of a Yahwistic sanctuary operating either at Mizpah or Bethel in the sixth century in view of this social and political shift toward the Benjaminite sites.[33] He notes that in the incident recorded in Jer 41:4–8 the pilgrims are presented as approaching Mizpah en route to the "house of Yahweh"; Jerusalem is never mentioned. Given that it would be implausible to think that the pilgrims were unaware of Jerusalem's destruction, Blenkinsopp argues that the pilgrims were traveling to a sanctuary in the vicinity of Mizpah, whether Bethel or otherwise.[34] Middlemas agrees that a cult center at Bethel likely functioned during the period when Mizpah was at the center of administration during the exile.[35]

Jules Francis Gomes and Philip Davies also argue that Bethel continued in the Neo-Babylonian period and played an important part in forming Israelite identity at this time.[36] Gomes highlights the importance of the fact that Bethel appears prominently in the various redactions of both the Abraham and Jacob traditions. He notes further that, through the reception of the promises of land and descendants to Jacob and Abraham, Bethel became the locus of two of the most important promises in ancient Israelite society—promises that made the Bethel cult and its community the inheritors of the land.[37]

Ernst Axel Knauf also has concluded that Bethel played an important role in the sixth century when, by virtue of its continued existence when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed, its rivalry with Jerusalem was at its highest. He suggests that it may even have provided an obstacle to the rebuilding of Jerusalem.[38] It seems, therefore, that there is some agreement that Bethel probably survived the Babylonian destructions of 586 and continued to function in some form during the sixth century.

Silence as Polemic

Despite the circumstantial evidence, it is clear that neither Bethel nor any community around or in Bethel is explicitly mentioned in the sixth-century biblical

[32] Ibid., 347–48; Lipschits, "History of the Benjaminite Region," 172–79.

[33] Blenkinsopp, "Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period," 96–98; Blenkinsopp, "The Judean Priesthood during the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods: A Hypothetical Reconstruction," *CBQ* 60 (1998): 25–43; see also Middlemas, *Templeless Judah*, 133–34; Scott M. Langston, *Cultic Sites in the Tribe of Benjamin: Benjaminite Prominence in the Religion of Israel*, AmUStTR 200 (New York: Lang, 1998), 100.

[34] Blenkinsopp, "Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period," 98–99.

[35] Middlemas, *Templeless Judah*, 134–44.

[36] Gomes, *Sanctuary at Bethel*, esp. 14, 59, 71–76; Philip R. Davies, *The Origins of Biblical Israel*, LHBOTS 485 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 159–71.

[37] Gomes, *Sanctuary at Bethel*, 67, 70, 86–99.

[38] Ernst Axel Knauf, "Bethel: The Israelite Impact on Judean Language and Literature," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 291–351.

texts. Yet the postexilic texts suggest that habitation at the site did continue, even if it was reduced significantly from what it was in previous centuries.[39] It thus seems that the silence of certain biblical writings, particularly Ezekiel, Isa 40–55, Lamentations, and Jeremiah, may have been part of a deliberate effort to downplay the importance or existence of Bethel.[40]

The possibility of hidden, or implicit, polemic as a rhetorical strategy has been noted in other biblical texts of this period in several studies.[41] Yairah Amit highlights the story of Micah the Levite in Judg 17 as an example of hidden polemic against Bethel, observing that the story of Micah is full of place-names, but the location of Micah's house is identified only as in the hill country of Ephraim; the city is not named.[42] Given the prevalence of other place-names and on the basis of textual indicators, she concludes that the unnamed city is Bethel and argues that Bethel is singled out for polemic due to its potential to act as an alternative to Jerusalem.[43] Amit argues that, in previous years when Jerusalem was stronger, there was no issue of condemning Bethel outright because Jerusalem could be held up as a better alternative. In the exilic period, however, when Bethel continued as a ritual center, the uncertainty surrounding Jerusalem may have led to a different expression of the Bethel polemic.[44]

Gomes also highlights the reticence of exilic and postexilic texts to refer to Bethel as a sanctuary or as having any kind of ritual significance, though some form of existence of the city is clearly attested by its presence in city lists and tribal records.[45] He identifies numerous texts that suggest worship continued at Bethel during the Neo-Babylonian period and observes that, despite the silence of some texts, the final redaction of the Pentateuch presents Bethel in a positive light.[46] Middlemas observes a "veiled association of Bethel with matters of a religious

[39] See, e.g., Ezra 2:28, Neh 7:32, 11:31, Zech 7:2.

[40] Or any other functioning Yahwistic cultic site.

[41] Strine has argued for hidden or implicit polemic against other figures or groups during this period in Ezekiel, manifested through "ambiguities," "hidden identities," and "hidden transcripts" (*Sworn Enemies*, 193–211, 228–66). See also Yairah Amit's discussion of anti-Saulide traditions in "The Saul Polemic in the Persian Period," in Lipschits and Oeming, *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, 647–61; and see further Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative*, trans. Jonathan Chipman, BibInt 25 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), esp. 93–249.

[42] Yairah Amit, "Epoch and Genre: The Sixth Century and the Growth of Hidden Polemics," in Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 135–53.

[43] Ibid., 139–41. See also Amit, "Bochim, Bethel and the Hidden Polemic (Judg 2:1–5)," in *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography: Presented to Zechariah Kellai*, ed. Gershon Galil and Moshe Weinfeld, VTSup 81 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 121–31, where she views the reference to Bochim as referring to Bethel.

[44] Amit, "Epoch and Genre," 142, 145.

[45] Gomes, *Sanctuary at Bethel*, 185–86.

[46] Ibid., 92–95.

nature in Zechariah 7:2" and argues in overall agreement with Blenkinsopp that Zech 7 hints at Bethel functioning as a religious center before the return.[47]

It seems, therefore, that the sixth-century texts sought to diminish the importance of Bethel, achieved via deliberate omission. Notably, the majority of these sixth-century texts also downplay the importance of Benjamin. Neither Ezekiel, Lamentations, nor Isa 40–55 mentions any of the Benjaminite sites, and Jeremiah mentions Mizpah only in chapters leading to the emptying of the land (Jer 40–41) and Bethel in a single debatable reference (Jer 48:13). As D. R. Jones says, "silence can be eloquent of contempt, but only if that which is ignored is common knowledge."[48] The sixth-century writers would have been well aware that Benjamin had replaced Jerusalem as the political and social center of Judah, so their silence is clearly deliberate. The lack of reference to Bethel in the sixth-century texts has been rightly accepted, but it should also be acknowledged that the sixth-century texts are largely silent about the Benjaminite region as a whole and have a tendency to omit reference to any other cult centers. In this context, the lack of explicit reference to Bethel or Benjamin in Isa 40–55 cannot be taken as proof that neither Bethel nor the Benjaminite sites existed during this time. Nor can it prove that the existence of the Benjaminite sites had no influence on the Isaianic author. Rather, the omission of explicit references to Bethel and Benjamin in Isa 40–55 is entirely in keeping with the rhetoric of the other sixth-century texts.

III. Jacob and Bethel in the Exilic Period

I turn now to an examination of the literary and theological traditions associated with Bethel, particularly with regard to Jacob. This section is a logical progression of the argument laid out in the preceding sections. If the author of Isa 40–55 can be located in Judah (section I) at a time when the Benjaminite region was prominent and Bethel (and thus its traditions) continued to function (section II), then this ought to have left some trace in the text. It is in this vein that we now focus on Jacob as the main patriarch of Bethel—and a surprisingly dominant character in Isa 40–48.

The literary and editorial history of the Jacob cycles is notoriously complex and cannot be explored here.[49] For present purposes the relevant issue is the

[47] Middlemas, *Templeless Judah*, 136; cf. Blenkinsopp, "Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period," 96–99.

[48] D. R. Jones, "The Cessation of Sacrifice after the Destruction of the Temple in 586," *JTS* 14 (1963): 12–31, here 13.

[49] See, e.g., Nadav Na'aman, "The Jacob Story and the Formation of Biblical Israel," *TA* 41 (2014): 95–125, here 96–100; Erhard Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen, VTSup 152 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 181–211; Jochen Nentel, *Die Jakobserzählungen: Ein literar- und*

association of Jacob with Bethel and the popularity of the patriarchal traditions in the exilic period. That there were traditions associating Jacob and Bethel in the preexilic period can be seen from Hos 12:2–6.[50] The majority of scholars accept that the Jacob traditions were likely northern in origin, due to the prominent position of Bethel in the narratives.[51] The tensions surrounding Bethel's legitimacy contributed to its complex portrayal in the biblical texts. On the one hand, Bethel was reportedly established as a deliberate anti-Jerusalem sanctuary (1 Kgs 12:26–30) and housed one of the much-maligned calf statues. On the other hand, Bethel was an ancient sanctuary associated with Samuel (1 Sam 7:16) that retained an important position in the Jacob and Abraham narratives and seemingly survived the fall of both Israel and Judah.[52] Additionally, through the setting of the patriarchal traditions in the premonarchic period, Bethel laid claim to traditions older than YHWH's election of Jerusalem, traditions that were independent of the fate of the monarchy. Indeed, if Bethel continued after 586, it is easy to see how it would have presented a challenge to Jerusalem, whose own legitimacy was tied to a fallen monarchy and a ruined temple.

Questions about the nature of the relationship between Bethel and Jerusalem and, more broadly, between Benjamin and Judah in the seventh–fifth centuries

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redaktionskritischer Vergleich der Theorien zur Entstehung des Pentateuch (Munich: AVM, 2009); Albert de Pury, "The Jacob Story and the Beginning of the Formation of the Pentateuch," in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Scholarship*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, SymS 34 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 51–72; Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer, "Comments on the Historical Background of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 317–38, here 321–32.

[50] Whether Hosea knew some form of the Genesis textual tradition or drew from oral tradition is still open to debate, but either way the majority of scholars date Hos 12 to the preexilic period (see Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 2 vols., Berit Olam [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000], 1:120; W. D. Whitt, "The Jacob Traditions in Hosea and Their Relation to Genesis," *ZAW* 103 [1993]: 18–43; for a Persian-period dating, see James M. Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea: The Case for Persian-Period Yehud*, LHBOTS 580 [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013]), although it seems more plausible to posit an early date for some form of the Jacob traditions, which developed over time and increased in popularity in the exilic period, probably as a result of Benjamin's preeminence.

[51] E.g., Blum, "Jacob Tradition," 209; K. P. Hong, "Once Again: The Emergence of 'Biblical Israel,'" *ZAW* 125 (2013): 278–88, here 285–86; Hong, "The Deceptive Pen of the Scribes: Judean Reworking of the Bethel Tradition as a Program for Assuming Israelite Identity," *Bib* 92 (2011): 427–41, here 429–32; James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1969), 170; E. M. Good, "Hosea and the Jacob Tradition," *VT* 16 (1966): 137–51.

[52] Grace I. Emmerson, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective*, JSOTSup 28 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 134–35; see also Stephen L. Cook, "The Lineage Roots of Hosea's Yahwism," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 145–61, here 146; Steven L. Mckenzie, "The Jacob Tradition in Hosea xii 4–5," *VT* 36 (1986): 311–22; W. J. Dumbrell, "The Role of Bethel in the Biblical Narratives," *AJBA* 2 (1974): 65–79.

have led to a series of conversations about the "Emergence of 'Biblical Israel.'"[53] For Philip R. Davies, the importance of the Benjaminite sites in the sixth–fifth centuries, at a time when Judah and Jerusalem were at their lowest ebb, is crucial to the emergence of biblical Israelite identity. Davies argues that the fall of Jerusalem meant that Mizpah, Bethel, and Gibeon became the primary cities. This impacted Judah's self-understanding of its own identity such that the term *Israel* (which stemmed from Bethel's connections with Jacob-Israel) came to be used for all Judah.[54] Nadav Na'aman agreed that Bethel was likely an important site in the sixth century but argued, contra Davies, that the use of the term *Israel* to refer to the peoples of the two kingdoms is preexilic rather than postexilic. He holds that the fall of the northern kingdom provided an opportunity for Judah to take over some of Israel's traditions and claim them as their own.[55] Yigal Levin notes that the postexilic prophets do not make a distinction between Judah and Benjamin. In his view, the redactional development of the story of Joseph in the Pentateuch suggests that a later hand has added the theme of a struggle between Judah and Joseph for control over Benjamin. This move implies that Benjamin was at the center of some tension.[56] Following Na'aman's earlier dating and arguments about Judah seeking to take over Israelite traditions, K. P. Hong has argued for Judahite appropriation of the Jacob traditions in the wake of 722 and contends that Abraham plays an important role in this regard.[57] He proposes that Judahite scribes reworked the Jacob traditions and placed Abraham ahead of Jacob in order to justify their claim to the land, in much the same way that Sennacherib's scribes placed Assur ahead of Marduk in an Assyrian revision of Enuma Elish.[58] Further, the Abraham narratives may also contain implicit polemic against Jacob, as seen in the appearance of Jacob's main site, Bethel, in the Abraham traditions (Gen 13:3 and 12:8), and Abraham's reception of a similar promise of land and descendants.[59]

Yet, although Hong argues for the possibility of Judahite scribes beginning to replace the Jacob traditions with Abraham as early as the seventh century, the

[53] Nadav Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel,'" *ZAW* 121 (2009): 211–24; Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel' (Continued, Part 2)," *ZAW* 121 (2009): 335–49; Israel Finkelstein, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel': An Alternative View," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 348–67; Hong, "Once Again."

[54] Davies, "Origin of Biblical Israel," 142–45; contra Finkelstein, "Saul, Benjamin," 365.

[55] Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin (Continued, Part 2)," 340–42; cf. Na'aman, "The Israelite-Judahite Struggle for the Patrimony of Ancient Israel," *Bib* 91 (2010): 1–23.

[56] Yigal Levin, "Joseph, Judah and the Benjamin Conundrum," *ZAW* 116 (2004): 223–41, here 231, 232–36.

[57] Hong, "Once Again," 285–86; Hong, "Deceptive Pen of the Scribes," 427–41.

[58] Hong, "Deceptive Pen of the Scribes," 438–40, here 438 n. 43: "With a successful program of promoting Judah as the new Israel, Judah in fact could assume and take advantage of all the Jacob tradition as our tradition (because we = Israel)." See also Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments on the Historical Background," 319, 332–34.

[59] Knauf, "Bethel," 322–23; cf. Na'aman "Jacob Story," 118; Hong, "Deceptive Pen of the Scribes," 439.

importance of Abraham in exilic texts is much more commonly attested.[60] Recently Thomas Römer, Tiemeyer, Strine, and Dalit Rom-Shiloni have all commented on the importance of the reference to Abraham in Ezekiel 33, where Ezekiel refutes the Judahite community's use of the Abraham traditions to claim ownership of the land.[61] Tiemeyer has emphasized the importance of the recurring theme of Abraham in a range of Judahite exilic texts, and Strine has argued for the existence of a combined Abraham-Jacob tradition. Römer, however, rightly notes that Ezek 33 refers to the Judahite community's use of Abraham as "one" with no mention of Jacob or of the stylized "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" triad.[62] Tiemeyer argues that Isa 41:8 and 51:2 affirm that the Abraham traditions were associated with the community in Judah, but, in contrast to Ezekiel, the Isaiah references support the Judahite community's claims to the land.[63] If so, then this would serve as further support for a Judahite origin of Isa 40–55.

In Isa 40–55, however, the references to Jacob-Israel far outweigh those to Abraham; it is Jacob that must be approached as the central figure of Isa 40:1–49:6.[64] Meira Polliack has suggested that the author of Isa 40–55 uses Jacob predominantly because his story is marked by more struggle and transformation than that of Abraham, and thus she concludes that an exilic audience would have found more relevance in Jacob's story.[65] Jacob's story does, admittedly, have struggle as a central motif that may have been attractive to the author of Isa 40–55, but the better-attested tendency of other exilic groups to prefer Abraham somewhat detracts from Polliack's emphasis on Jacob's relevance as opposed to Abraham's.

The question then arises with regard to Isa 40–55: how to situate Jacob in an

[60] E.g., John Van Seters, "Confessional Reformulation in the Exilic Period," *VT* 22 (1972): 448–59; Na'aman, "Jacob Story," 95–125.

[61] Thomas Römer, "Abraham Traditions in the Hebrew Bible outside the Book of Genesis," in Evans, Lohr, and Petersen, *Book of Genesis*, 159–81, here 162–63; Tiemeyer, "Abraham," 50–52; Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 181–90. Dalit Rom-Shiloni presents the discussion in terms of in-group and out-group claims and configurations (*Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People Who Remained [6th–5th Centuries BCE]*, LHBOTS 543 [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013], 144–56; see also Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Judeans, Jews, Children of Abraham," in Lipschits, Knoppers, and Oeming, *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period*, 461–83, here 471–73).

[62] Tiemeyer, "Abraham," 65; Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 177–215; Römer, "Abraham Traditions," 162–63. Whether one views the patriarchal traditions as combined or competing during the Babylonian exile, it is clear that the traditions themselves and the books that used them were continually developing throughout the sixth century and later.

[63] Tiemeyer, "Abraham," 56–57.

[64] Römer has even questioned whether the Abraham references in Isa 41:8 and 51:2 are part of a later redactional layer seeking to unify themes across the book of Isaiah and are perhaps later than Isa 40–55. Abraham occurs elsewhere in Isa 29:22, 41:8, 51:2, and 63:16. See Römer, "Abraham Traditions," 169–71.

[65] Meira Polliack, "Deutero-Isaiah's Typological Use of Jacob in the Portrayal of Israel's National Renewal," in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, JSOTSup 319 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 72–110, here 79.

exilic context where Abraham was becoming a figurehead for the Judahite exilic community, while Jacob had been previously associated with northern Israel and Bethel? Perhaps the answer lies in Benjamin. The Benjaminite region survived the destruction of Jerusalem, and it is entirely probable that, in the wake of 586, Benjaminite traditions would have been strengthened by the legitimacy of survival. It seems possible that a community in Benjamin, perhaps around Bethel, may have claimed legitimacy via Jacob, much as others claimed legitimacy via Abraham. While Jacob was more closely linked to the regions north of Jerusalem, Abraham seems to have been more closely connected to Jerusalem and the area south of it, as a result of his connections with Hebron and the southern tribes. Given the disparity between the functioning cities north of Jerusalem and the destroyed and empty ones in the south, it seems entirely possible that there may have been multiple communities in Judah claiming ownership of the land via recourse to different Judahite traditions. We turn now to Isa 48:1–11.

IV. Isaiah 48:1–11 and the House of Jacob

A more detailed study would explore all the references to Jacob in Isa 40–55 in light of the preceding discussions in sections I–III of this article. Within the scope of the present discussion, it is possible to focus on only one section here.[66] Isaiah 48:1–11 has been selected for consideration because, first, verses 1–2 constitute the most specific identification of the house of Jacob in chapters 40–55, and, second, 48:1–11 has proven difficult for commentators. Despite the prevalence of the term *Jacob* and its common parallelism with *Israel* in Isa 40–55, the term *house of Jacob* occurs only once elsewhere (46:3).[67] Given that *Jacob-Israel* are such

[66] For an overview of the occurrences of Jacob in Isa 40–66, see H. G. M. Williamson, "Jacob in Isaiah 40–66," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40–66*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer and Hans M. Barstad, FRLANT 255 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 219–31. I am grateful to Professor Williamson for providing me with a copy of his article. See also Gary N. Knoppers, "Did Jacob Become Judah? The Configuration of Israel's Restoration in Deutero-Isaiah," in *Samaria, Samarians, Samaritans: Studies on Bible, History and Linguistics*, ed. József Zsengellér, SJ 66, StSam 6 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 39–68. In this article Knoppers argues that some of the references to Jacob-Israel in Isa 40–55 have a much broader audience in view than others (cf. 43:1–7, 45:22–25, 46:3–4, 49:1–6). Knoppers cautions against the tendency to view all the Jacob-Israel references as having a single narrow audience. Interestingly, he raises the possibility that the "tribes of Jacob" in 49:6 need not necessarily refer to the old ancestral traditions but, rather, could demonstrate acknowledgment of the complicated diaspora demographics (67). To be clear, in arguing that Isa 48:1–11 has a specific referent, I do not deny that the audience/group referred to as Jacob-Israel elsewhere may be far broader; I am merely arguing that the house of Jacob in Isa 48:1 may be one part of this greater whole.

[67] The term *house of Jacob* occurs elsewhere in Isaiah only in 2:3, 5, 6; 8:17; 10:20; 14:1; 29:22; 46:3; 58:1, while *house of Israel* occurs only in 5:7, 8:14, 14:2, 46:3, 63:7.

common terms in Isa 40–55, yet "house of Jacob" occurs only twice and "house of Israel" only once, when these houses do appear they likely have a more specific agenda than the broader Jacob-Israel references found numerously elsewhere.

Commentators who view the bulk of the passage as original to a sixth-century prophet have noted that in chapter 48 the tension between prophet and audience, previously only hinted at (40:18–20, 27; 43:22–28; 44:9–20; 45:9–11; 46:5–12), comes to the fore.[68] Not only does the prophet speak in a harsher tone than before, but the passage occurs at a turning point in the book. Chris Franke emphasizes the pivotal nature of chapter 47 and notes that in chapters 40–46 Jacob-Israel lives in fear and oppression, whereas in 47, "the theme of downtrodden Israel is replaced by the prophecy of downtrodden Babylon."[69] Elsewhere, H. G. M. Williamson has suggested that 49:1–6 is another pivotal point. Although in chapters 40–48 there were indications that the servant was Jacob-Israel (41:8–10; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:20), Williamson argues that in 49:3 the statement "you are my servant" functions as a redesignation of the servanthood that did not come to fruition with Jacob-Israel and is now passed to an individual or group whom YHWH hopes will be more successful.[70] It seems significant that the harshest passage against the house of Jacob occurs between the vivid image of the fall of Babylon (ch. 47) and a potential redesignation of the servant (49:1–6). Notably, after 49:6 the figure of Jacob-Israel largely disappears from the text and is replaced by Zion-Jerusalem.

In 48:1–2 the members of the house of Jacob are identified in various ways. They are "called by the name of Israel," but "came forth from the loins (or waters) of Judah" (וממי יהודה יצאו); they "swear by the name of YHWH" and "invoke the God of Israel, but not in truth or righteousness."[71] They "call themselves after the holy city" and "lean on the God of Israel." These verses are the first time in Isa 40–55 that Jacob is explicitly associated with the community of Judah. The point here is that, although the group in question calls itself Israel, the members of the house of Jacob are inherently Judahite. It is interesting that the author emphasizes this point, as we would have expected the house of Jacob to be from Judah and thus not requiring emphasis.[72] Francis Nataf notes that the very fact that Jacob has two names—

[68] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 287; K. Jeppesen, "From 'You, My Servant' to 'The Hand of the Lord Is with My Servants': A Discussion of Is. 40–66," *SJOT* 4 (1990): 113–29, here 115–16.

[69] Chris A. Franke, "The Function of the Satiric Lament over Babylon in Second Isaiah (xlvii)," *VT* 41 (1991): 408–18, here 410–11.

[70] Williamson, "Jacob in Isaiah 40–66," 224; see further Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah*, Didsbury Lectures 1997 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 147–55, here 148.

[71] Commentators are divided on whether to render ממי יהודה with the MT as "waters of Judah" or to emend with the suggestion in *BHS* of ממעי יהודה, "womb/loins of Judah." Either way the emphasis is on the group's close relationship with Judah.

[72] Although this could be seen as a comment aimed at the Babylonian exiles who sought to distance themselves from the Judahites—Ezekiel's use of the phrase "house of Israel" springs to

Jacob/Israel—is a deviation from the usual biblical type scene whereby things have one name and if a new name is given it usually replaces the old (e.g., Abram–Abraham).[73] Nataf argues that by retaining the old name (Jacob) alongside the new name (Israel), the Bible maintains a dual legacy of Jacob.[74] It seems that Isa 48:1 uses this dual legacy inherent in the character of Jacob to state that the house of Jacob is still caught up in Jacob's sin.[75] For the author, although the house of Jacob may have changed their name to Israel and claimed a new identity, they were still intertwined in the old heritage of Jacob, as shown by the illegitimacy of their cultic actions.

Reinhard G. Kratz observes that the author of Isa 40–55 is aware of a difference still existing between Israel and Judah, and he views 48:1 as the prophetic author saying that only the Judeans who come out of the waters of Judah are called by the name of Israel. Therefore, the author uses the title "house of Jacob" to address the nation as a whole in order to level out the geographical and political differences.[76] Although Kratz seems correct in his observation that the use of Jacob-Israel in Isa 40–55 may well entail an effort to level out geographical and political differences between Judahite groups, the reference to the house of Jacob in 48:1–11 seems more specific. The reference to the house of Jacob having come from the waters, or loins, of Judah makes it seem unlikely that the entire community is envisaged as the addressee, as do the statements of the following verses. In 48:1–2 the dismissal of the house of Jacob's swearing by YHWH and invocations of the God of Israel are dismissed as nonrighteous and without truth, which is at odds with the more positive portrayal of Jacob-Israel elsewhere in chapters 40–55. Even in 40:27 (the only time Jacob-Israel speaks), in which Jacob-Israel is critical of YHWH, he is not accused of invoking or addressing YHWH illegitimately.[77] This also seems to

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mind—the reference to the group calling themselves after the "holy city" perhaps does not fit so well with the exiles, who had a tendency to portray Jerusalem and the cities of Judah as corrupt and sinful. R. N. Whybray argues that Jacob-Judah-Israel in 48:1 has the whole nation in view and not merely the Judeans, though the specificity of the identification of the group seems to work against this (*Isaiah 40–66*, NCB [London: Oliphants, 1975], 127). Differently, J. D. W. Watts contends that those called by the name of Israel in 48:1 are those who have participated in covenant ceremonies (*Isaiah 34–66*, WBC 25 [Nashville: Nelson, 2000], 722). Schoors emends the verse because of its uniqueness (*I Am God Your Saviour*, 286), but this seems unnecessary.

[73] Francis Nataf, "What's in a Name? Ya'akov and/or Yisrael," *JBQ* 40 (2012): 241–46.

[74] Ibid., 46.

[75] Contra Reinhard G. Kratz, who argues that Jacob in Isa 40–55 represents a new beginning ("Israel in the Book of Isaiah," *JSOT* 31 [2006]: 103–28, here 113). Steven L. McKenzie contends that the reference in 48:1–2 is an allusion to the changing of Jacob's name, as the reference to the waters or loins of Judah seems to refer to Jacob as the individual patriarch ("Jacob in the Prophets," in *Jacob: Commentaire à plusieurs voix de Gen. 25–36: Mélanges offerts à Albert de Pury*, ed. Jean-Daniel Macchi and Thomas Römer, MdB 44 [Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2001], 339–57, here 355).

[76] Kratz, "Israel in the Book of Isaiah," 123.

[77] There might be a similar tone in 43:22–28, wherein Jacob-Israel is criticized for having brought offerings and sacrifices to YHWH, but this is a much-debated passage. John Goldingay

suggest that the criticism of the house of Jacob in 48:1–11 is aimed at a more specific group than the usual audience addressed by the broader nomenclature Jacob-Israel.

It has long been noted that the imagery in 48:4 of a neck of iron sinew and the hard bronze forehead is part of common language signaling obstinacy that is found elsewhere (Exod 32:9; 33:3, 5; Jer 6:8; Deut 9:6, 13; 31:27; Ezek 3:7–8). But the references to "things you have never heard" (48:6, 7), the "unopened ear from of old" (48:8), and the statement "from birth you were called a rebel" (48:8), have posed something of a puzzle for commentators. Some have argued that the verses are interpolations, as it hardly makes sense to state that Israel's ear was not opened "from of old."[78] If, however, the house of Jacob in 48:1 refers to a specific group within the broader conception of Jacob-Israel, then there is no contradiction between the harsh statements of 48:1–11 and the message of comfort promised to Jacob-Israel elsewhere in chapters 40–55. Isaiah 48:6–8 can be understood as directed to a specific group who are singled out for a message of judgment, in much the same way as the author singled out those who were tempted by idols (40:19; 41:7, 28–29; 42:17; 44:9–20; 45:16; 46:5–7; 48:5).

That the house of Jacob claimed to know YHWH's plans (48:5–6; cf. 58:2) suggests some form of cultic activity, which fits well with the idea of these verses being directed to a group based around a sanctuary (perhaps also supported by the reference to the holy city in 48:2). The claim of 48:6–8 that the house of Jacob "never knew" the things YHWH was about to do and "from of old" their ear was not opened, suggests that the house of Jacob had a long history and was not an entirely new innovation. Furthermore, chapters 46 and 48 both associate the house of Jacob with rebellion (46:8, 48:8), and something similar can be seen in 58:1–2. Scholars usually note that other prophets have similar conceptions of Israel being a rebel from the beginning and some have even suggested links between this verse and Ezekiel or Jeremiah.[79] The theme of rebellion, however, is found also in 1 Kgs 12, where the establishment of Bethel and Dan in opposition to Jerusalem is narrated.

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concludes that 43:22–28 addresses the present generation and is designed to make them aware of their shortcomings in preparation for YHWH's plan ("Isaiah 43, 22–28," *ZAW* 110 [1998]: 173–91), but Thijs Booij understood it as a reference to the preexilic cult ("Negation in Isaiah 43, 22–28," *ZAW* 94 [1982]: 390–400). In contrast, John L. McKenzie argues that Isa 43:22–28 includes both generations: when Israel was able to offer sacrifices in the preexilic period they did so without devotion, and now that they cannot offer them in the exilic period they fail to worship YHWH properly (*Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, AB 20 [New York: Doubleday, 1968], 60).

[78] Walter Bruggemann, *Isaiah*, 2 vols., WeBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 2:103; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1969), 196; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 289.

[79] E.g., Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66: Translation and Commentary*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 311–12; J. L. McKenzie notes that the theme of early rebellion is current in the exile, whereas previous prophets (Hos 2:17; Jer 2:2) contrasted early fidelity with current unfaithfulness (*Second Isaiah*, 96); John N. Oswalt notes that many commentators interpret this as a

Given that Bethel was established as a deliberate act of rebellion against Jerusalem, it is possible to read 48:8 as a reference to Bethel's origin.

It is perhaps also noteworthy that the Benjaminite cities that survived the Babylonian invasions—seemingly because they surrendered when Judah did not—may well have been viewed by those within the ruined Judahite cities as having rebelled against Judah. The history of the region may also have contributed to its having a rebellious reputation; Benjamin appears to have been closely linked to Judah in the early days of the monarchy, then it became part of the northern kingdom, then it became part of Judah again, and then it survived when Jerusalem did not. As a region, Benjamin seemingly had a habit of changing sides and outlasting the kingdom that controlled it.

Although the figure of Jacob-Israel is pervasive in Isa 40–48, he is not presented as a model of good behavior. He complains against YHWH (40:27), displays stubbornness (48:4) and rebellion (43:27, 46:8, 48:8), fails in cultic practice (43:22–28), and perhaps fails in servanthood.[80] YHWH has punished him (42:24–25, 43:27–28, 48:9–10), and the fact that the house of Jacob still existed was for YHWH's own sake (48:9–11) and not due to any inherent righteousness or holiness of the group in question. Tiemeyer argues that Jacob-Israel probably refers to a group in Judah, and in light of sections I–III of this article, I propose that the group referred to as the house of Jacob in 48:1–11 could be understood as a sixth-century community in the Benjaminite region, most likely in the vicinity of Bethel.[81]

V. Conclusions

For much of the sixth century, the Benjaminite region replaced Jerusalem as the social and political center of Judah, and it is highly likely that, as a consequence of this newfound importance, Benjaminite traditions would have increased in popularity during this time. I have argued that, if we are to posit a Judahite origin for the core material of Isa 40–55, then this background should be taken into consideration. Further, I have contended that the house of Jacob in Isa 48:1–11 refers to a specific group within the broader conception of Jacob-Israel in Isa 40–55. This solves some of the perceived inconsistency between Israel's relationship and communication with its God, and the statements of 48:1–11 that the house of Jacob calls on YHWH illegitimately and that they have never known YHWH's plans. In light of evidence demonstrating settlement continuity in the Benjaminite region and arguments that Bethel continued to function after 586, combined with the centrality of Bethel in the Jacob and Abraham traditions, I have proposed that the house

reference to the exodus (*The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 268); cf. also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 290; Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 198.

[80] Cf. Williamson, "Jacob in Isaiah 40–66," 223–25.

[81] Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*, 219–20, 225, 237, 239, 240–43.

of Jacob in Isa 48:1–2 be identified with a group in Benjamin, perhaps in the vicinity of Bethel. This may better explain the author's choice of Jacob as the central figure (rather than Abraham), the mistrust of the self-identification of the group in 48:1–2, and the accusation of their Yahwistic actions being illegitimate. Read this way, 48:9–11 serves as an explanation that the preservation of this group—and perhaps the city in which they were based—was due not to its holiness or righteousness but only to YHWH's choice not to profane his name. Although Bethel is not mentioned explicitly in 48:1–11, or elsewhere in chapters 40–55, this omission is in keeping with other sixth-century texts that omit references to any Yahwistic shrines and tend to avoid mentioning the Benjaminite cities altogether. The region of Benjamin may well have offered some hope to the Judahites in the early years of the exile, and perhaps the mounting frustration in Isa 40–48 that comes to a head in 48:1–11 speaks to this situation, expressing the failure of this Yahwistic community and thus looking forward to the hope of the new servant and the restored Zion.